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Today's News Briefs

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Brown strives to answer questions about gas process

PAYETTE — The main issue for Richard Brown and his company, Snake River Oil and Gas, is to get the word out about his company as well as the oil and gas industry. For those in the Payette County area, Richard Brown may be a household name very soon.

The gas industry has been one of the major issues arising recently since Bridge Resources began buying leases in the local counties the last few years. Idaho has become a hotspot for the gas companies looking to drill in a confirmed gas spot. The industry is brand new to the state and its residents, however, and the first company that really made a name in the area, Bridge Resources, barely made themselves known, except to those leasing their mineral rights.

Brown wants to make sure that everyone knows about Snake River Oil and Gas, as well as Weiser-Brown Company and is holding town hall meetings and presenting at SREDA as well as local city council meetings.

"We're trying to be very transparent and very visible," Brown said. "We're not a huge company. We're not Exxon-Mobile. We're a family-owned independent oil and gas company. We try to get out there in front of the public. In this case, there's a lot of unknown because this hasn't been done in Idaho before. We have to double, triple, quadruple our meetings and have the information out there."

The company is currently making a website to make the information more accessible to the community where they will also be able to post questions, he said.

The industry is challenged by opposition scared from the stories they have heard about mistakes happening in other states by gas companies.

At a recent town hall meeting in Payette and Weiser, residents voiced their concern for groundwater and air quality as well as the need to frack.

Fracking is a controversial technique used to extract gas using a mixture of fluid and stimulation of the ground. The fluid and the technique in general have caused major damage to groundwater and health concerns to those living near the drilling.

Bridge Resources initially claimed it would not need to frack the land, then used the term "mini-fracking" as something they would do eventually. This change of plans angered some residents because the company had assured them there was no need for the technique.

At the town hall meeting, John Peiserich, a lawyer from Arkansas and presenter at the meeting, said there would not be a need to frack.

"This clay does not lend itself to fracking," Brown said. "That's one of the misconceptions. These sands we're finding is a totally different animal than all the publicity you're seeing on the national stage. This is not a shale, these are conventional sands. We'll perforate them, but this is not a fracking candidate."

Amanda Buchanan, Weiser, was at the meeting in Weiser and hopes people will see both sides of the issue.

"Whether someone is against this industry or not, to a large extent, doesn't really matter," Buchanan said. "Idaho's statutes are incredibly industry-friendly, and so whether you love gas or hate gas, the industry's going to be here."

The industry will bring economic development to the communities. However, the people of Payette County and the surrounding area the gas companies are showing interest need to make sure that this development is responsible and does not hinder the counties, Buchanan said.

Be aware of the positive aspects the industry can bring locally but also be wary of the negative impacts it poses, she said.

"I don't think any gas company is going to come to Idaho with a perfect record," Buchanan said. "The problem is, they don't want to talk about the risk they pose. Instead, they like to talk about money. Communities deserve an honest conversation about the risks."

Brown said, in his business, mistakes happen. The gas companies who make these mistakes hurt the entire industry with a broad brush. That is one of the reasons why he wants to be available for the local area.

Idaho District 9 Sen. Monty Pearce attended the town hall meetings and was glad that people were given the opportunity to voice their concerns and ask questions about the industry.

Although some people had already made up their minds against the industry, others had legitimate questions they wanted answered.

"People brought up their ghosts," Pearce said about those who brought up the stories of mistakes of the industry across the country. "I hope the ghosts were taken care of and those people are no longer seeing it. America is filled with great natural resources. We need to use our natural resources, wisely and carefully, but use it nonetheless."

"I feel the industry coming in is a very positive move for the area and for the state," Pearce said. "I think when we utilize natural resources we do get more jobs. We can sure use a boost. Any (mistake) can happen, but the possibility of it is so low. There's some who are instilling the fear of worst-case scenarios into the residents, and that shouldn't be. People need to be hearing the truth, from both sides of the issue."

Mistakes do happen in the industry, Brown said. However, his company has drilled 600 to 1,000 wells in the last 25 years.

"I encourage you to contact the director of Arkansas Gas Commission, Larry Bengal, where Weiser-Brown Company is largely active and ask about our company," Brown said. "I welcome that because if I were the folks in Payette County, I'd be a little reticent about trusting this out-of-state company. Just because I tell them it's safe doesn't mean much. Check our resumes and references."

Brown's company is currently active in Washington, Malheur, Payette, Gem, Canyon and Owyhee counties. Brown said he could not say whether he was leasing at this time.

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